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NO MEDICAL PRACTITIONER,
IN ENGLAND OR FRANCE,
COULD OR CAN POINT OUT
ONE SYMPTOM PATHOGNOMONIC
OF A
SYPHILITIC VIRUS.

BY
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DR. MACLOUGHLIN ON THE NON-EXISTENCE OF A SYPHILITIC VIRUS.

[EXTRACT FROM THE *Medical Times and Gazette*, JANUARY 26TH, 1867.]

TO THE EDITOR.

36, Bruton Street, Berkeley Square, W.

SIR,

LONDON, 31st Dec., 1866.

I HAVE before me the Army Sanitary and Medical Report for 1864, and the Naval Medical Report of the Health of the Navy for 1863. From these two reports, it appears that the loss of service yearly, by the so-called Syphilitic Disease, is equal to the loss of the whole force of the Army and Naval Service in this country for eleven days. Permit me to ask, if there is such an entity as a syphilitic virus? In other words, is there such a disease as a specific syphilitic disease?

At this moment two opinions divide the Medical world as to what are the pathognomonic symptoms of this syphilitic virus. The first is that of Mr. Hunter, and the second is that of Dr. Record, of Paris.

Mr. Hunter maintains "*that the pathognomonic symptoms of a syphilitic ulcer are, that the specific inflammation is confined to the base of the ulcer on the reproductive organs; that the base is hard; and that the edges of the ulcers are a little inverted.*"

Dr. Record maintains that no one, by his eyesight or by his touch, can ascertain the existence of syphilitic virus in an ulcer on the reproductive organs, but he asserts that every ulcer on the reproductive organs which secretes an inoculable pus contains the syphilitic virus.

Is either of these opinions correct?

Herpes præputialis in the male, and herpes pudentialis in the

female, is a disease which occurs spontaneously in both sexes, and without coitus. The ulcer on the prepuce of the male has most commonly a hard base. If we read Mr. Hunter's observations on the rise and progress of what he calls the true chancre on the reproductive organs, we remain satisfied that Mr. Hunter mistook the Herpes præputialis ulcer for a true chancre. Besides, if the hardness at the base of an ulcer on the reproductive organs is the only proof of the existence of a syphilitic virus, why have we not that hardness at the base of an ulcer affecting the glans penis?—no finger ever yet detected such hardness at the base of an ulcer on the glans penis.

Fifty-six years ago, at Lisbon, to prove that the hardness at the base of an ulcer on the reproductive organs is not pathognomonic of a syphilitic virus, I saw two medical officers apply caustic to their healthy prepuce,—two hard-based ulcers were the consequence.

Moreover, is it not at this moment known to every scientific medical practitioner, that hardness at the base of an ulcer on the reproductive organs, depends on the tissue in which the ulcer is situated, and on the degree of inflammation which accompanies it? See *Bateman on Cutaneous Diseases*.

Therefore Mr. Hunter's test of the existence of a syphilitic virus is an error.

Dr. Record, the great syphiliclographer of the age, says that every ulcer on the reproductive organs which secretes inoculable pus contains the syphilitic virus.

Fifty years ago, I was present at Valenciennes, in the north of France, when my late friend Dr. Murray, Inspector-General of Army Hospitals, took pus from an herpetic præputialis ulcer in a state of active inflammation, inoculated with it, and with perfect success.—See *Dr. Evans on Syphilis*.

Very recently, the distinguished scientific Surgeon of St. George's Hospital, Mr. Henry Lee, attempted to inoculate with pus from an ulcer in a state of chronic inflammation, but failed. He, however, irritated that ulcer, excited active inflammation, then this ulcer secreted inoculable pus.

Therefore, inoculable pus depends on the state of active inflammation in which the ulcer is, and not on a specific syphilitic virus.

Of this fact Dr. Record is himself aware; for he recommends that the pus for inoculation be taken from an ulcer before that ulcer

has existed fourteen days. After fourteen days, he says, the ulcer becomes chronic, and secretes no more inoculable pus.

Therefore, Dr. Record's test of the existence of a syphilitic virus is also an error.

Consequently, no medical practitioner, in this country or in France, is justified to state that an ulcer on the reproductive organs, or on another part of the body is caused by a syphilitic virus.

Hence, I conclude, as the result of my experience during these last fifty years, that all ulcers on the reproductive organs, the consequence of "Coitus," can be radically cured by ablution, rest, and attention to the general health.

Two years and a half ago, when there was such an outcry about this so-called syphilitic disease in the Army and Navy, I addressed a pamphlet to the Secretary of State for War, pointing out to him that no medical practitioner, in this country or in France, could or can demonstrate the existence of a syphilitic virus, and I suggested the appointment of a Scientific Medical Committee to inquire into its truth.

In consequence of the publication of that pamphlet, I was sent for to the Admiralty, for my advice what could be done to protect the sailors and the soldiers from this so-called syphilitic disease.

My advice was to appoint a Scientific Medical Committee, to carry out the inquiry suggested in the above pamphlet.

Subsequently, *the* Lord Clarence Paget, then Secretary to the Navy, informed the House of Commons, on the 19th July, 1864, that the Government had decided on appointing a Scientific Medical Committee to study and to report on this so-called syphilitic disease.

On the 3rd September, 1864, I received a letter from the Admiralty, addressed to me by order of the then First Lord of the Admiralty, his Grace the Duke of Somerset, informing me that a Medical Committee had been appointed, as I had suggested.—See Appendix, No. I.

That committee have now published the instructions under which they acted, and they have published their Report.

It is evident that the instructions given to that committee were drawn up by persons unacquainted with medical science, and unacquainted with the object for which this committee was appointed.

Thus, these instructions assume that there is a syphilitic virus—the very thing which is more than doubtful—and to ascertain its existence this committee was appointed.

And the instructions go on telling the committee “*that they are specially to direct what is the best medical treatment for this so-called syphilitic disease, without inquiring particularly into its pathology;*” thus calling on this committee to prescribe for a disease, the pathology of which they had not ascertained, and treating this committee as quacks and impostors.

The committee accepted this unenviable position; and, true to their instructions, they also assumed the existence of a syphilitic virus; they again and again refused to hear proofs of the non-existence of a syphilitic virus; they have not examined one witness scientifically; they have suppressed and they have mutilated the testimony of witnesses to meet their preconceived opinions; they have made confusion worse confounded; their Report is a disgrace to the medical acquirements of this country, and is a deception practised on the public.

In the interest of the Army—in the interest of the Navy—and in the interest of humanity, I again took the liberty to suggest to the War Office, and to the Admiralty, to appoint another more carefully instructed and more carefully selected medical committee to carry out this important investigation. The War Office have answered my letter that they did not intend to appoint another medical committee, and I have been unofficially informed that the Admiralty have also decided to have no further inquiry.

It rests, therefore, with the War Office, and with the Admiralty, to refuse inquiry into the cause which deprives the country, yearly, of its whole military and naval strength for eleven days.

And to doom yearly thousands of men of both services to have their constitution injured—themselves rendered unfit for military or naval service—and, too often, their life ultimately destroyed—by being subjected to a so-called specific medical treatment—for a so-called specific disease which does not exist.

I have the honour to be, &c.,

Your obedient Servant,

DAVID MACLOUGHLIN, M.D.

Member of the Legion of Honour.

APPENDIX, No. I.

COPY OF A LETTER FROM THE ADMIRALTY.

ADMIRALTY, *2nd Sept.*, 1864.

SIR,

I AM directed by the Duke of Somerset to acknowledge your letter of the 1st instant, and to inform you, in reply, that the Board of Admiralty and the War Office have decided to appoint a joint committee to inquire into the question of Syphilis in the Navy and Army, which course was urged upon the Board by yourself, in connection with the pamphlet addressed by you to the Secretary of State for War.

His Grace desires me to add, that you are at liberty to make any use you think proper of this communication.

I am, &c., &c.,

(Signed) A. BUCKLEY.

To DR. MACLOUGHLEN.

